

Jennifer Stock: You're listening to Ocean Currents, a podcast brought to you by NOAA's Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary. This radio program was originally broadcast on KWMR in Point Reyes Station, California. Thanks for listening!

(Musical Intro)

Jennifer Stock: And welcome everyone, you're tuned into Ocean Currents, I'm your host, Jennifer Stock, and I bring this show to you the first Monday of every month on KWMR, a show where we dive into the blue part of our planet, the ocean. We talk with scientists, educators, explorers, all sorts of different folks, all to talk about the vital part of the ocean in our daily lives.

So it's October, and in this region we call this time of year, "Sharktober." Because it's the annual return of the white sharks, that have been out at sea, and have been in different parts of the ocean, and they come back to the coast here in the Point Reyes area here, between the Farallone islands and Point Reyes, all the way down to Anya Nuevo, and the focused research on them. But there is also more than that, and today we're going to play, I'm going to play, and interview that I did just about a week and a half ago, with two local shark enthusiasts, local Point Reyes, and Inverness residents, Ron Elliot and Scott Anderson. And both have unique access and understanding of this local predator, the white shark, and so you will hear a conversation with Scott and Ron today on ocean currents. So thanks for tuning in a stay with us.

(Tape starts rolling)

Jennifer Stock: I'm here on a beautiful fall day with Ron Elliot, a former urchin diver, long time ocean lover, and generator of local lore, particularly in regards to diving with white sharks. And Scott Anderson, who has been studying the local white shark population between the Farralone islands and Point Reyes for over 20 years.

So, Scott, this time of year is particularly exciting for you because... what happens this time of year?

Scott Anderson: Well, this is the time of the year when the sharks typically start going out to the areas where we look for them. So, this is when they start coming back, so we're excited to see who starts coming back, so how many are coming back and all that.

Jennifer Stock: So, where are they coming back from?

Scott Anderson: Most of them go out to this larger area we call the "Café" and the Café is an area between the Hawaiian islands and the tip of Baja, and it's huge, it's bigger than the state of Texas, but that's where most of the sharks spend the winter months. Some of the sharks go through the Hawaiian chain through to the other side, but we don't call that the Café.

Jennifer Stock: How did you and Ron meet?

Scott Anderson: I don't really remember the first time we met, but I watched Ron go diving at the Farallones for years before we met, so I sort of already knew him, and I could tell he was a careful diver and yeah, he used to go diving right where I was looking for the sharks, so. I was in the white house looking down, and I don't know if you ever looked up, but it was pretty easy to watch him.

Ron Elliot: I did. I looked up. (Laughs) Well, Scott, I remember that some of the people I knew that worked for the park knew Scott, and said, "Oh, he's got some amazing footage." And I said, "Oh, I bet he does" And so finally there was a bunch of times when I was out there running around in the little wailer and we'd wave at each other and one day we just started talking, you "Hey, how's it going, did you see anything, yeah I did..." And it just kinda started from there.

Scott Anderson: It was bound to happen

Jennifer Stock: What drew you to Point Reyes Ron?

Ron Elliot: Well, I was diving urchins down in southern California, and so I was based out of Santa Barbara, and even though we were still uh, down in Santa Monica I communed when I was diving urchins, it was always somewhere else. And eventually the north coast, there

was a lot of interest in the urchin business then, a few years earlier there were these guys that were in the Fort Bragg, Point Arena area developing the fishery, and so it was kind of like virgin stock, there were these guys that were harvesting a lot, for me to come up here was like an adventure to change what I had been doing for a number of years in southern California, so I came up and tested the waters there was about, it was in the early 80s, I knew one of the local guys, he came from Venice originally, and we'd been visiting him for a few years, before I actually moved here. So we kinda knew the area, we'd been introduced to a lot of people, so we didn't move in here cold, not knowing somebody, We got to know a lot of the ranchers and fishermen, different people and stuff, so that was kind of nice, you know.

When our daughter graduated high school and our son was already out of high school, we said, "You can keep the house and figure out what you want to do for the next year, but we're leaving." And so we bailed out and came up to Point Reyes. And then, you know, I tried to base my diving operation out of Bodega Bay area, and it was a great get away.

Jennifer Stock: And so, there was a buyer in Bodega Bay?

Scott Anderson: Yeah, back then there were a couple buyers in Bodega Bay, and back then, in the beginning of the 80s the Japanese market was real strong, or rather the dollar against the yen was very strong, and back then it was like 240 yen to the dollar, and not it's like maybe 80. But back then it was a real strong market, so we didn't have to worry about how much to send over to Japan, they would take almost all the volume that we could send over, and so this was the place to be, and it was great for a while, and then their economy started falling apart and then things started tapering down.

And same thing with processors, we had processors right during the harbor, we had some that would go all the way out to Fort Bragg or Sacramento, and eventually they all disappeared and then trucking became a big issue, and so that's kind of how my urchin diving career came to an end, I didn't really want to travel again.

When it tapered off I had had enough of traveling and sleeping on a sleeping bag in the boat.

Jennifer Stock: Yeah, and what year was that, about?

Ron Elliot: Um, 2004 was the year that I stopped diving for urchins,

Jennifer Stock: And the urchin delivery was starting to take a break, but you stayed in the water ever since then—are you still going to the Farallones?

Ron Elliot: Yeah, I was just out there a couple weeks ago. Yeah, what had happened at that time, there were a lot of politics, the urchin business was changing, you know, the prices were like, back like what they'd been 15 years before, and so the polish or the glow of the industry was tarnished for me, and I was looking for a way to bow out of doing it, I was just kind of praying for an answer, and so the bad economy of it, and I don't like picking a lot of urchins and giving them away for nothing, it just didn't seem to make sense, and so eventually what happened was there was a film being done, and a guy approached me about doing a little short film, and then there was this gal, whose name is not to be mentioned (Scott snickers) and so it was kind of like the perfect storm. All these things came together, but the one guy doing these short films, that was Teeth, wanted me to take some underwater footage with this camera I had. And so I went down and got a couple of shark shots, and some sunfish under the water, a different things like that, and that was kind of fun, I enjoyed that, and we had grandkids at the time and they were real young, and that kind of baited me, I enjoyed that and then really six months, or seven months later I stopped diving all together, and I just kept carrying around a camera, because I enjoyed documenting what I had experienced from 89 to 2004 that wasn't filming, so I just wanted to keep doing it and found something I had a passion for.

Jennifer Stock: That's so cool. So, you've had a lot of experiences seeing sharks underwater, most people the fear of that, of the shark, keeps them out of the water completely, but how come you don't have that?

- Ron Elliot:* Uhhhh. I get nervous, you know there is plenty of time for it to rattle, it's not something that's predictable, it's not a place where I have control, and I like that. I don't like controlled settings and I like nature the way it is. So that part is trilling, yeah, I get a lot of enjoyment out of that.
- Why I keep going back? Well, it's not about the sharks, you know there's a lot of really cool critters over the bottom, and then occasionally you get to see a whale under water, or a mola-mola fish, or all of the different jellies. I never used to pay attention to that stuff when I was making money, it was all about making money and I appreciated the environment, but I didn't pay attention to it like I do now, and so there's always something that can be the smallest little interaction, a little critter down there, but I enjoy it. It hasn't worn off.
- Jennifer Stock:* So you were looking at everything when you were down there, not just the sharks. I've heard you talk about your times underwater, has there been a time when you were there any times when you felt out of control with a shark approaching you, getting closer. I mean, what does it feel like?
- Ron Elliot:* Yeah, well I never felt in control, that's the whole illusion, if you feel like you're in control you're going to be taught a different lesson. It's just that most of the time when I've had interactions with sharks nothing happens, it's just curiosity it's, it's no big deal. There's a few times that register in your mind when they don't fit that mold, and they can get aggressive, and a couple times, you know either near the surface or breaking the surface, or swimming down, I did experience that there were ones that looked like they were on full attack. And then they break off at the last minute because you don't break down.
- Jennifer Stock:* They say, "Hey that's Ron, better leave him alone."
- Ron Elliot:* I wish, right up to that last couple feet I was wondering myself, but as the years went on and they got a little more used to people, when decoys, and cage boats came around, you know a lot of that stuff kind of disappeared, they became used to it, they learned from it. And so I don't have those kinds of experiences very often

any more now. I still come close, the other day I had one, kind of bumped me again.

Jennifer Stock: What do you mean, “bumped you?”

Ron Elliot: (Laughs) Well, I was filming it, and it turned, and right then another one came by, and knocked me from behind, and that was the same day that I injured myself on the boat, after that dive I fell on the boat. Maybe I was too excited, I don’t know. But it’s rare, and I never feel in control, because they come from behind you or whatever, and you have no idea, you just have no idea

Scott Anderson: One thing I just like to say is that Ron is a really good diver and very confident, because he’s been there before he has a certain kind of ability that I am sure the sharks can pick up on. And so the average person may not be able to get a way with it, but to me it’s sort of proof that if a person can sort of dive where there’s white sharks and not be eaten, I think most people would think that couldn’t happen. If a person’s qualified like Ron is, I mean it is surprising Ron hasn’t been bitten yet, but you know, hopefully he won’t be.

Jennifer Stock: Do you think part of that is just looking like you’re fairly predictable under water, as opposed to being more swimmy?

Scott Anderson: He’s confident, and he knows where he is. Really I think the only time he gets worried is when your hose disconnects or when you’re forced to come to the surface when you’re not ready to, but I don’t know. Something like that can be disappointing, right?

Jennifer Stock: Now how many times are you in the water at the same vicinity?

Scott Anderson: We see each other on a daily basis when the weather is good out there, it’s just the month of October, but Ron continues to go after that.

Jennifer Stock: So how do you decide on your locations for tagging sharks, and you two are tagging? Or photo ID?

Scott Anderson: Yeah, we're doing all of that, we hope to get a photo ID of them and then tag them. Yeah, so there are maybe four or five spots around the island. And we probably go the same two in the beginning and move out from there. So, we have a hydrophone which allows us to listen in on sharks who've been tagged, so we know if there's on in the area, usually there's more. So we'll stay in those areas and then we'll tell Ron, "They're over here." And then he'll jump over

(Ron and Scott laugh)

Jennifer Stock: Do you follow him around?

Scott Anderson: We follow each other, he some times sees them, and we don't.

Ron Elliot: If he tells me they're over there it's hard not to go over there.

Jennifer Stock: Oh my gosh. So, I'm curious, when you're on the islands have you ever seen an attack and Ron be near by, underwater and wonder, "Hmm."

Scott Anderson: Well yeah, so the best example is back when I was first on the island, I was working for a biologist names Phil Henderson, and Phil was always worries about sharks and divers, and jut because he had been there years ago when a diver on the North Farallons had been bitten by a shark and it was a big problem and he had to be air lifted out, and anyways Phil's always worried. So every day he would come up to say, and me "Do you think we should tell him? Do you think we should tell him?" And finally one day, I think it was about after a month, I said, "I don't think we need to tell him, I think he knows. " Later on we did figure out he knew and, you know, you could tell he knew, because we'd seen other divers come out there and stay a couple days and then they're see something, and they were gone after that, you could tell they saw something. One guy had a bang stick, and he saw a shark that came to the surface, he was swimming on the surface, and his flipped hit the bang stick and set it off, and the other diver was still down, and they were trying to start the motor to get the guys attention, and it was just a fiasco, and those guys never came back after that.

Jennifer Stock: You're tuned to Ocean Currents, and you're listening to a conversation between Ron Elliot and Scott Anderson talking about white sharks in the region.

Jennifer Stock: Ron, what are you hoping to see? What would you like to see?

Ron Elliot: Well, OK, a humpback,

Jennifer Stock: (laughing) That's a good one. How about a blue whale?

Ron Elliot: Well, I've seen grey whales, but I have not experienced a humpback underwater, not here. But that would be exciting; I mean it is awe-inspiring when you see something like that underwater. And then you know, I don't really put expectations on it, I like being surprised, and you know, there's a lot of days you go out there and you don't see any sharks, and if I had real high expectations well, I'm not going to be happy unless I see a shark, and I'd be really bummed out and I'd stop doing it, because the sharks have learned to be not-so-curious, And a lot of them I think do know, you know, the sound of my boat, ricking there, and my bubbles, and I think they know that routine, so the curiosity factor, for I think a few of them, is they're there, they're on the periphery, but they really don't care to be filmed. And it did change for a long time me carrying a camera, compared to just urchin diving where I am doing something else, and I am preoccupied and they would get a lot closer, and come by a lot more, and even swim by me, not because they weren't paying attention, and I mean that still can happen, but you still filming something and you've got this big cow eye of a lens looking at them, and they know. They know when you turn your head you're looking at them, and this adds another dimension to it, so for a long time, some of the sharks are just a little more reticent where you can come in close and get a good shot of 'em, so. That's changed a little bit over the years, so I'm a little more devoted to being patient, and I don't know what else I want to see, but that's what keeps me going.

Jennifer Stock: One thing I see with your work, Scott, is that certain sharks you can really visually know, "Oh, that's so-and-so." And I remember that there's some shark that has a slip of the gills or something,

Scott Anderson: We know a bunch of them pretty well.

Jennifer Stock: Do you have the same recall with sharks return year after year?

Ron Elliot: There are some that are very noticeable to me. I don't have the same eyes as Scott.

Scott Anderson: Well now Paul's got the eyes, I can't even keep up with him.

Ron Elliot: But you know, I'm not a researcher, so I don't really base all my stuff on identification, I'm just kind of there for the wonderment,

Scott Anderson: Well you look at stuff like if it's a male or a female, you know that now, or if it has a distinctive fin, like that one we hadn't tagged for years...

Ron Elliot: It was missing a leg or something, I probably noticed that.

(Scott and Ron laugh)

Ron Elliot: It's just kind of afterwards, when I get my film and I look at it, then I see things. At the first it's a little bit more... I just take in the whole thing, and I come back later. Because I used to tell Scott, when I was just urchin diving, "Well, I think these were all females." Well there are times when I think I see females and I get home and run the video, and then I see the claspers, and they're tucked up under there pretty good, and I'll get, "Oh! That's a male, see? I got fooled." And so, having the video and looking back I see that I was misidentifying some sharks, and there were some that had the top dorsel cut off, that I thought maybe was another shark, until I take a video, and I'd tell Scott, "It's this!" And then I look back and I'm like "Oh, this one's got claspers," or "this one doesn't." But there's a lot of them that have this top of the dorsal chopped back at an angle, and I've gotten fooled by that.

Jennifer Stock: What do you think that's from?

Scott Anderson: Well it can be lot's of things, there's all different kinds of different injuries and that's actually one of the papers is actually tracking

the scars and marks on the sharks to see what caused them. All kinds of things, they run into all kinds of different issues, but the main reason I want to do it is to break down the thing about females have mating bites, and whether they're fresh or not, because there are a lot of papers questioning the female migration and things like that and their whole reproductive cycle. And when someone documents a shark and says it has mating wounds on it and they're fresh, but in reality they're months old... well that makes a major difference in what they're saying. So, we want to clean that up, but it's going to take a little bit of work. We see all kinds of things about the sharks that are sort of natural history observations, Some come in with all their teeth, their gums are all clean and it looks like they haven't bitten anything in months, and other ones they're all beat up and you can tell they've been feeding for months. So, lots of little details you can get from looking at them in detail. So the main point I want to make here is the new video cameras and the new digital cameras make this all really possible, because like Ron was saying, you can come back at the end of the day and figure it all out. You know, in the old days you had to wait for film, the resolution wasn't the same, just everything is better, we get more detailed information than we used to.

Jennifer Stock: Do we know where sharks pup?

Scott Anderson: Yeah, southern California bite, down into Baja. Because little baby ones are seen in July every year down there.

Jennifer Stock: I've heard a lot of sightings of gill neck catches, it seems like they are young sharks.

Scott Anderson: Yes, but the big ones need to go down there to give birth, so at some point females go down there and birth in the spring, early summer, and the little ones end up feeding on fish and when they get to a certain size they end up coming up the coast here, and at some point they end up going out to the café and doing that annual migration.

Jennifer Stock: Where did the story start, and I still hear it today, that Tamalis Bay is a breeding ground? Is it because of leopard sharks?

(Everyone laughs)

Scott Anderson: I don't know who was the first one to say it, but talk about an urban myth that's gone international. I mean I talk to people from England who have heard that. And it can't be based on the fact that there are little baby sharks there, because there aren't. Umm, there are large sharks across the point of course, at Point Reyes and Tamalis Point, and they were caught by fishermen off the point, and a few little ones were caught in the bay, and that could be where it is, and the bay is full of small sharks, little grey hounds, brown hounds, leopard sharks, you name it. So that could be it.

Jennifer Stock: There are some sharks that breed in Tamalis Bay, but they're harmless.

Scott Anderson: Absolutely, leopard sharks, brown smooth hounds, bat rays, angel sharks, there's a bunch of different shark species that use the bay, but white sharks specifically rarely come in the bay. They may have back in the day when there was white sea bass, but I haven't ever seen one in the Bay, that's for sure.

Jennifer Stock: Ron, do you ever dive off of Tamalis point?

Ron Elliot: Yes.

Jennifer Stock: Now, do you dive to the bottom, or are you more mid water?

Ron Elliot: Now, OK, most of the time the water is... I mean occasionally it's fairly clean.

Jennifer Stock: Like bluish-clearish?

Scott Anderson: That would be great.

Ron Elliot: Very rare, that would be great. (Laughs)

Jennifer Stock: I've seen it at Cordell Bank, really clear, but that's offshore.

Ron Elliot: I'd love to dive in that all the time, but Tamalis is kind of a funny place, it can look OK on top, and then you get down there, and you

start getting all these little particle in the water, and so when you start looking. You can look down in the water, and if you can see the bottom that's great, but when you get down and look, anything that's in the water the sun refracts off it, and it changes your horizontal visibility quite a bit, and so for filming occasionally I usually get down to the bottom, comfortably get off the bottom and then just swim around the reef five or six feet, something like that, occasionally I'll get up at mid water, only if you see the bottom of the water and not get disoriented. Because when it gets really dirty you can't tell, and it is like being lost in a fog. You start to not know where you are or if you're up or down, you equilibrium gets... and it's not comfortable. And also, probably not safe. Because you're looking around, you can't see so well, so you end up checking around a lot more. It's just not very comfortable at all.

(Nervous laughter)

Ron Elliot: So it's disorienting more than anything else, so I just try and judge by the amount of visibility I have how to get off the bottom and swim. And as far as sharks approaching me, sometimes if I'm just four or five feet off the bottom, swimming along, I think they a lot of times feel more comfortable approaching me then. Sometimes when I'm up in mid-water, just swimming around, you know I've done that quite a bit, and I don't always feel like it works out. You know it's like I think, "Oh, this should do it." That's what I think, but what they do is something totally different. So.

Jennifer Stock: What do they do?

Ron Elliot: They just don't even offer themselves to be seen, or I might see a shadow, so it's kind of a catch-22 it's all up to them,

Jennifer Stock: So, is it typically like a fly-by situation? Where they're just coming around checking you out, and then move on?

Ron Elliot: Yeah a lot of time it's in the shadow, I'll see something right out here, and it stay just right out there, where you just see this shadow, and occasionally see a shadow, and then they get close enough where I can see them pretty good? They've gone by me.

Scott Anderson: And that's when he starts looking.

Ron Elliot: Yeah, and then it's like, "OK" and you sit there and go, "OK." And turn to the left, kind of wait for the shadow to all of a sudden reappear, and sometimes it does, and a lot of times it doesn't, because that's all it needed to do was just checking me out, whether I was just in the way of where they were going, I don't know.

Scott Anderson: These sharks here in California, or at least off the coast act differently than the ones you see in the films Like when they bait sharks in Australia, or South Africa, the sharks come up to fish chum, and they swim around the whole time that the boat's there. Around here we get maybe one or two or maybe three passes out of the shark and then they disappear, because they've seen us before, they've seen Ron before. They thing that's hard to remember is that it's the same animals over and over, we keep seeing the same ones, and so they've seen us and they're used to it a certain way, and so they're selective about the decoy. When I first went out the Farallones, I barely needed to put out anything and they would've jumped out of the water to attack it, but they've seen so many decoys, especially since the dive boats are there all day long for the entire fall, with a decoy out,

Jennifer Stock: You're been listening to Ocean Currents, I'm you're host, Jennifer Stock, and you've been listening to a conversation with Scott Anderson and Ron Elliot, two west Marin residents that are experiencing and learning about white sharks on a first hand basis, this time of year, in Sharktober.

(Musical interlude)

Jennifer Stock: Have you ever experienced territorial behavior with white sharks?

Ron Elliot: Well, that's what I would call it when I am sometimes under water, because it's not a full on attack, they just come up to you they gape their mouth open, it's more of a, because you know they have certain little area that they like to patrol, and every once in a while you'll get one that gives you a threatening motion, and, yeah. I would call it like a territorial type thing. Definently.

Jennifer Stock: Have you ever been have pushed physically?

Ron Elliot: Yeah, yeah.

Jennifer Stock: How so.

Ron Elliot: Well I've had times where I like had my urchin basket and I needed to put that between me and it, because they came up with their mouth and I had to push my basket, and one time I had my basket over my head because it really thumped me good. But other times I would just push it and, you know, hit him in the nose or the face there (Scott laughs) and they'd back off. And then they just circle around and give up. So.

Um, one time there was a big one that, it was the day before Christmas, or no.... it was Christmas, because my wife was out of town and I didn't have to do anything, and it was one of these females that got really big and fat, and it was one of those days on the main top bay where it was that water, was like that beautiful water, and I was urchin diving, and I was out in deep water, maybe 50-60 feet, working my way up into shallower water where my boat was, and this big female, maybe 18 feet, just fat, obviously pregnant, just really big and pristine looking, and didn't have any scars on it, almost like it came out of a mold it was so pretty, and with that water it was really stunning. But I was getting metered out so I was working my way across the sand alleyway to make my way back up to the shallower reef area and get under my boat. So she came in and I said, "Ahh, I gotta get going." So I kind of jumped up and swam at her like to make her detour off, and she took exception to it, so instead of going on an angle, right by me, she just dead turned on me and just, "Vwoosh!" Like came right at me, and I was like, "Whoa!" And went right to the bottom, by my urchin basket in this little razor reef, and she came down like she was going to squish me with her belly, and it was like, "Whoa!" It was pretty impressive, and usually when a shark would go by me like that I'd come up behind it, and then they didn't like that, so I immediately bounced off the bottom and came up behind her, and I've never seen a shark turn so fast, and I was back down on the bottom like a pancake. She didn't try biting me, she tried to almost

give me a belly slam, and then her tail whipped real hard, and all the little shells started floating up in the water, and I was like totally impressed. I was like, "Whoa!"

Jennifer Stock: Oh my gosh.

Ron Elliot: So you get something like that in your mind, and you remember those things, like, "I started it." If I left her alone, she was fine, but just my little idea of scaring her away was ... so that was more like a territorial thing, that's how I took it.

Jennifer Stock: So you learn, every time you go down you learn a little bit more how to be with them.

Ron Elliot: Yeah, and back then it probably wasn't so important really to pay attention too much to 'em, just let 'em be. And not be like, "Hey, I'm trying to work." Because I did learnt hat a couple times, and now I don't do that. When I'm filming them I just let them do whatever they want to do. I just try to stay still, have a slow breath, and let them do what they want to do. You know, I'm not there to scare them away. I'm not there to beg them in, but if they do come close that's fine with me.

Scott Anderson: Yeah, we don't see a lot of territorial behavior because they think that we're like a floating carcass or anything, so that's what we see. But what Ron was talking about with pointing the camera at them, we used to use larger cameras, it definitely looks like a big eye, you know the lens is about six inches in diameter. And when you would point it right oat them, at their eye, they would almost always dart away. So they really don't like something staring at them, they're kind of used to coming from the side, and stuff like that. I don't know, they have this tiny brain, but they're good at what they do. You know, it's hard to relate, "What's it like to be a white shark, what's it like to be down there day after day?" It's just hard to imagine.

Jennifer Stock: They're highly evolved; they're good at what they do.

Scott Anderson: Another thing that sort of point to a little more respect is that, you know, we've known that they probably live longer than anyone

thought because we have one individual with a 26 year record, and it was 12 feet when it was first seen, so when know that they live longer than the literature originally estimated, which is 15-16 years, but there's a paper that's going to come out and show they've done some analysis of the rings, and some other things, and they've estimated that they can live to be between 70-90 years old.

Jennifer Stock: Wow!

Scott Anderson: Which is kind of more in line with what we've been thinking.

Jennifer Stock: You'll have to be in the water a long time!

Scott Anderson: I know, we should have started in the water a long time ago, huh?
(Laughs)

Ron Elliot: Ha, we'd be in wheelchairs by now.

Jennifer Stock: So you've been doing this for over 20 years, have you seen any sharks that you saw at the beginning?

Scott Anderson: Yeah, this one. We named it Tom Johnson because Tom Johnson was a naturalist who was on the Salty Lady back in 1987, he photographed this shark feeding off a seal in east landing, and we've seen that shark, we saw it last year. And it shows up at Tamalis sometimes and moves out to the Farallones, but we've seen it on and off for all that time and it's bigger now, it's probably 15 feet, but the fin has stayed identical to what it was. So, it's a really good record. And there are several others who are in their 20s. So, I think if we had started with a good cameras and equipment and a boat and a bunch of people in the Farallones back in 1987 we'd know a lot more than we do, but we've been putting in a more concentrated effort now for eight or nine years.

Jennifer Stock: So it seems like the media is always going for the sensational story, and they've given sharks a bad rap, with the high media coverage of shark attacks and sometimes loss and it seems like there is little coverage regarding the attacks on sharks, like the shark finning... what are your thoughts on that? You know this

population, you know how beautiful they are, how do you feel about that Ron, and how do we change that?

Ron Elliot:

Well, since we, those who like to go into the ocean; surfers, divers, swimmers, basically we are in their element; we are in their back yard. So when something happens I would call it an incident, but really, the word "Attack" is really like someone who has premeditated harm to go do to somebody. So really, I don't call them attacks, I call them incidents because they're so random, especially with white sharks, it's like a mistaken identity, maybe like with bull sharks, or some of those others, they just have so much testosterone, you know, they're just going to bite, or something like that (Scott agrees) but white sharks they're very selective of what they attack, and so to me I would call them more of an incident, so I think there's a lot of... you know that "Attack" word is... you know? I don't like that word.

Jennifer Stock:

Yeah.

Ron Elliot:

Because, you know, if you're in their element something is going to happen eventually. So, you know I kind of feel like that is just part of it, you just have to accept it if you're out in the water and it's so random, it's not something you can predict. And then the other thing about this sharks is that, like Scott said, these animals are so big, their reproductive cycle, their growth, so anything that disturbs that could be kind of detrimental, and they are up on the upper ends of the food chain, and you know we've seen how detrimental that is, sharks are, and all the species are very slow on their reproductive cycle, and you know I just I think there're changes underway, but anything that kind of brings out, you know, we are lucky to have the resource we have, and the resource is very delicate, there's so many people with interactions that there should be a lot of respect for what's out there, and we're so blessed to have what we do have, and just to take some certain things for money only... cus when I was urchin diving, I loved being out there, the whole idea, and I was making money, but I also convinced myself I wasn't doing any harm. Now, maybe you could find some harm in it, but I tried to be selective, and not be too greedy about what I was doing, but that's a conscious thing, you know? Now that I'm older I see things a little more clearly. And

uh, I have a lot of respect now for our resources, and protecting (them).

Jennifer Stock: Have you seen a change in Gulf of the Farallones, just in terms of the habitat over the 20-30 years you've been in the waters here?

Ron Elliot: Well, there have been some regulations. When I used to dive out there in the early days, there was some long liners and people like that out there, there wasn't as many sport fishing boats, umm... the commercial fishing guys would fish outside, but the draggers used to get close, and not that I'm saying anything, but I think since some of these regulations have gone into place there's some boundaries and no take around the island, and it pushes that traffic, because it's a small little area, and it's a great, you know it's a very productive, very vibrant area, you know with the upwelling and everything, it's a great little area, but it's small and it can be really hammered, so I think by backing off some of the fishing and the no-take zones, is very important, you know it took a long time but I think it's a big help.

Jennifer Stock: Have you seen changes underwater, with you eyes?

Ron Elliot: Well the one thing I noticed over the years was that there was a lot of bottom fish, the red snapper, the lingcod, and all the blue rockfish, and black rockfish. So I don't see as many, and I'm not out there quite as much as I used to be, but I don't see as many of the big giant ling cods and things, I see 'em, but I don't see 'em to the same extent. For a while there, when the shark thing got real popular, and there was all kinds of boats, coming in, and fishing wasn't very good for other things, maybe on one day you could see 100 fishing boats, around that island, I mean I had 'em drift into me while I'm sitting there at anchor, there were so many, and they really targeted the shallow water for all these rock fish. And I did see a difference, less rockfish down there, especially the big mature ones, and I also noticed that the ling cods that had the big bellies of eggs, some of those fishing seasons don't coordinate with their actual seasons for spawning, when they're laying eggs. So I think now, as there's been a little time, not a whole lot, you know it would be interesting to see how it's changed around the whole island, where I've seen those females with more eggs,

because you'll go into the rock piles and you'll see these big blocks of eggs, and so I'm interested to see how that is, because Tamalis is a great place where you see a lot of ling cod in shallow areas back in the rocks where they have their eggs, and so those are the kinds of things that I see, and so I'm hoping to see that kind of change now, since the pressure has really been relieved around there.

Jennifer Stock: We just have a few minutes left and I'm curious, you said you had grand children, and you have this great respect for this ecosystem, what message would you like to impart to this next generation of caretakers?

Ron Elliot: A lot of my family members aren't ocean people, you know, they start throwing up as soon as they get out there.

(Everyone laughs)

I mean carol is good, but the kids, my daughter and son, they just couldn't do it, you know? So they're not so in tune, but our grand daughter, taylor, and Jackson, they're very good on the water, and they love it, and so I think they're be very good, they're very respectful, and they think about things, they're not just into these visuals, games and all this stuff.

Jennifer Stock: That's good.

Ron Elliot: Yeah. So I have hope for them.

Jennifer Stock: Are you going to take them diving?

Ron Elliot: Um, when their mother lets me. (Laughs in unison)

Jennifer Stock: Do they want to go?

Ron Elliot: Uh, Jackson does, yes he does.

Jennifer Stock: What about you Scott? With all the changes you've seen and all the issues we're facing, what would you like to communicate?

Scott Anderson: Well, I guess the big change I'm seeing at the Farallones now, and I guess I should have expected it, I should've seen it coming, is there are a number of fur seals there, and it's increasing exponentially, and back in the day when the sealers were there, there were 50 thousand of them, so if they were to reach those types of numbers again they would outnumber any of the other seals of sea lions, so they might become a major prey item. Right now we see more of them on the water than we've ever seen adults and juveniles, and they sit at the surface, and act like the other seals and sea lions don't. So they're either going to get attacked and spit out, or attacked and eaten, I don't know, but the dynamic is going to change, because there is a lot of them, and more all the time. And so that's the biggest change I see. The less traffic out there is better for that place, because like Ron said, it is small. Well you could take, I mean East landing is the size of downtown Inverness, which is isn't very big, so you got a small place, so it's easily overly impacted, it's good that people can still go there though and see a place, and experience it, But I think the main thing that is happening in the world, and especially California, is that there's just more people, and more people equals more problems, and you know, we all love the ocean and experience it and stuff like that, but it doesn't take much to mess it up. So, I don't know, it's great that there are all these organizations looking out for it. And I don't know, people can treat it like it's there back yard, because it is, then look in your yard, and are you taking care of your yard? Or is it trashed? That's how we need to consider the ocean. Keep it clean.

Jennifer Stock: Excellent. (Looking at Ron) You have a story that you're holding on to?

Scott Anderson: He told more than he usually does. (Laughs) Just going to have to pry it out.

Ron Elliot: Well I always have a story I'm not going to tell.
(Everyone laughs)

But no, it's an interesting pro... I'm always still learning, and that's good. And so I'm always learning something, I'm always kind of in awe, and I think that's why I enjoy it so much, is that I

don't know that much. There's very little, what I know, and I like staying that way. I like to learn, a lot of times I don't want to know too much. It's not ignorance is bliss, because I lived that way for a long time, but I enjoy, with Scott and the other researchers, they have integrity in what they do, I've seen them over the years, and I really appreciate that. When I was urchin diving we had researchers and stuff involved with fish and game, some of them had n agenda, so I had a bit of a bitter taste. Some of them, I'm not saying all of them, just some of them. And being around Scott and the guys, you know? It's renewed my faith in how they approach their research, and so it's been very enjoyable for me, and then meeting the people at the sanctuary, and there's a lot of passionate people who give a lot of time, and I'm glad some of the changes came because it's a delicate ecosystem, it's not a big area, so we've got something really great here, and I'm glad to see there's a change for the better.

- Jennifer Stock:* That's wonderful. What are the names of the two films you're in that people can see online?
- Ron Elliot:* Devil's Teeth, not the book (Scott laughs) the video, the 10-minute video, avoid the book.
- Scott Anderson:* Sanctuary in the Sea,
- Ron Elliot:* Sanctuary in the Sea, and then the Great White Highway is...
- Scott Anderson:* I think it's online.
- Ron Elliot:* Is it online now?
- Scott Anderson:* Google it, you know I'm sure it comes up as some Youtube file, or if you can't find it that way, there sure be some way to find it, you know everything's on the computer.
- Jennifer Stock:* Well thanks guys for chatting a little bit, it's so nice to hear these stories, because this is a place that so few people get to experience and understand, it's really hard to let people know about how amazing it is. You have a really unique experience that few, few people have.

Ron Elliot: Well in this area though, we're lucky. SO all the surfers and divers and everybody that enjoys this area, they don't live here, you know if you live here you can still enjoy it, because even if you're not a water person you're still around it. And it's just another part, you know, with all the parkland and this whole setting, you know, we're lucky. There's a lot here.

Jennifer Stock: Yeah, there's a lot to take care of too.

Scott Anderson: Yep, very lucky.

Jennifer Stock: You've been listening to Ocean Currents, to an interview with Ron Elliot and Scott Anderson, two local shark enthusiasts, visiting the area to research and enjoy the white sharks we have here, which not very many people do, very interesting folks. And I just wanted to bring it to your attention, It's October, and that's why we focused on sharks this month, because this is the annual time of the year when the sharks return to this region, so for those of us that enjoy playing in the ocean, I think it's good to remind ourselves to be aware. And just a couple tips in terms of some smart things to do. And that would be to not swim alone, it's nice to have a buddy on the beach, keeping an eye on you, and also just having in the water. Avoid places with lots of seal in the water that is often a case of mistaken identity when sharks interact with humans, in ways that are not necessarily pleasurable. Making sure you're not near fishing boats and places where there might be bait in the water, especially if there are birds that are diving in the water, then there might be a lot of food under the water, and being alert for subtle cues in the environment. These are all just common sense things for us ocean lovers, to allow us to safely enjoy the ocean, because as Ron was saying earlier, it's just so random and you can't predict it, so we just need to be aware, and that chances (of interaction) are extremely low. But they are not entirely absent, so in fact I'm going to have another interview in a couple weeks, we're going to have an interview with Jonathan Kathrien, who was 16 years old when he was attacked by a shark at Stinson Beach, and he survived and has made a very productive future as a result of that experience, it really changed his life, and he is a really strong defender of the importance of sharks within the ecosystem,

and he's going to be on the show during a very special episode of Ocean Currents, during the pledge drive. SO tune in then, October 21st.

Ocean Currents is the first Monday of every month, and you can hear all the past episodes online at www.cordellbank.noaa.gov, all the episodes are there as well as through a podcast on iTunes. And I love hearing from listeners, so if you have a chance and want to share what you think of the show, or have ideas for future topics, please do email me. Jennifer.stock@noaa.gov and I'd love to hear from my listeners.

And I just want to follow up, there are three films that Scott and Ron mentioned that are online, and they're really great films if you have a chance to get online and check them out. Great White Highway is online, on Youtube, and I couldn't figure out if there is a fee for it, as it's part of the Discovery Channel, but it is online. And Sanctuary in the Sea is a wonderful film that is done by Bob Talbot, and Ron is actually the main character of the film. It's a bout a 25 minute film and it talks about his entire life around the Farallon islands and who has seen such amazing things underwater, and you can see some of his video footage in there, so a really interesting one to check out. And also Devil's Teeth, this is another one on Youtube, that you can all check out online. To see some of Ron Elliot's video footage and see what he sees under water, it's such an incredible place out there in the gulf of the Farallones,

So thanks again for tuning into Ocean Currents. My name is Jennifer Stock and I'll be back next month, but I'll also be back October 21st for a very special show during the pledge drive, talking with Jonathan Kathrien. Thanks for tuning in.

(Musical outro)

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